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UNCLAS PARAMARIBO 000195

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: SURINAME SHOCKED OVER GUYANA TAKING IT TO UNCLOS TO
RESOLVE MARITIME BORDER DISPUTE

REF: GEORGETOWN 195

1. UPON THEIR MARCH 2 RETURN TO SURINAME AFTER A VISIT TO CHINA, SURINAMESE PRESIDENT VENETIAAN AND MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS MARIE LEVENS ANNOUNCED SURINAME'S INTENT TO CAREFULLY STUDY THE CASE BROUGHT AGAINST SURINAME BY GUYANA BEFORE UN CONVENTION OF THE LAW OF THE SEAS (UNCLOS) REGARDING THE ONGOING MARITIME DISPUTE (BUT NOT LAND OR RIVER BORDER DISPUTES) BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES. THEY VOWED THAT THE GOS WOULD IMMERSE ITSELF IN PREPARATIONS FOR THE CASE.

2. SURINAME, ACCORDING TO LEVENS, WILL MOVE QUICKLY TO FORMULATE "A RIGHT COUNTER ATTACK" IN RESPONSE TO GUYANA'S INITIATIVE AND WILL PRESENT ITS POSITION TO THE UN SHORTLY. LEVENS ADDED THAT, TO ASSIST ITS CASE, SURINAME WILL HIRE INTERNATIONAL ADVISORS, MANY OF WHOM HAVE ALREADY CONTACTED THE GOS OFFERING THEIR SERVICES. SHE NOTED THAT THE GOS WILL UTILIZE A PREVIOUSLY SCHEDULED MAJOR SEMINAR ON EXCLUSIVE ECONOMIC ZONES THAT IS TO BE HELD IN MARCH IN SURINAME TO DISCUSS GUYANA'S UNCLOS COMPLAINT WITH PARTICIPATING UN EXPERTS. SHE ADDED THAT SURINAMESE AMBASSADORS AND OTHER EXPERTS WHO HAVE BEEN WORKING ON THE BORDER DISPUTE WILL BE CALLED BACK TO SURINAME SHORTLY FOR A WORKING MEETING TO DISCUSS GOS STRATEGY/TACTICS.

3. ACCORDING TO THE PRESS, VENENTIAAN DENIED THAT GUYANESE PRESIDENT JAGDEO HAD TRIED TO CONTACT HIM BEFORE GUYANA TOOK THE STEP OF BRINGING THIS ASPECT OF THE BORDER DISPUTE TO THE UN. LEVENS TOLD THE PRESS THAT SHE WAS SURPRISED AND DISAPPOINTED THAT GUYANA HAD CHOSEN TO ACTIVATE THE UNCLOS DISPUTE RESOLUTION MECHANISM, PARTICULARLY AS GUYANA AND SURINAME HAVE HAD DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN THEIR JOINT BORDER COMMISSIONS IN THE PAST TWO YEARS. LEVENS SAID THAT SURINAME HAD ACTED IN GOOD FAITH BASED ON ITS HOPE THAT A BILATERAL SOLUTION WOULD BE REACHED FOR THE ENTIRE BORDER DISPUTE. SHE ADDED THAT, CONTRARY TO GUYANESE PRESIDENT BHARRAT JAGDEO'S CLAIM THAT SURINAME HAS OBSTRUCTED EFFORTS TO RESOLVE THE BORDER DISPUTE, SURINAME HAS ALWAYS BEEN OPEN TO DIALOGUE.

4. IN LIGHT OF GUYANA'S CASE BEFORE UNCLOS, LEVENS DECLARED CATEGORICALLY THAT GUYANA SHOULD VACATE THE DISPUTED TIGRI/NEW RIVER TRIANGLE AREA AND THAT THIS MOVE MUST BE TAKEN BEFORE DISCUSSIONS CAN CONTINUE ON THE UNCLOS MATTER. SHE POINTED OUT THAT GUYANA HAD AGREED TO REMOVE ITS TROOPS FROM THE DISPUTED LAND AREA IN THE 1973 TREATY OF CHAGUARAMAS.

5. COMMENT. SURINAME SEEMED GENUINELY SHOCKED THAT GUYANA HAS GONE TO UNCLOS TO SEEK A RESOLUTION OF THE ONGOING MARITIME BORDER DISPUTE. SURINAME HAS ALWAYS SOUGHT TO BUNDLE RESOLUTION OF THE THREE PARTS OF ITS BORDER DISPUTE WITH GUYANA (MARITIME, RIVERINE, LAND) TO LEVERAGE CLOSURE. IT CONSIDERS THE REAL BLOCKS TO PROGRESS (A) THE GUYANESE REFUSAL TO RESOLVE ALL THREE ASPECTS OF THE DISPUTE AT THE SAME TIME AND (B) THE GUYANESE MILITARY PRESENCE IN THE DISPUTED LAND BORDER REGION. ONCE GUYANA RESOLVES THE MARITIME DISPUTE VIA THE UNCLOS PROCEDURE AND FOCUSES ON THE OFF-SHORE OIL FIELDS, SURINAME IS CONVINCED THAT THERE WILL BE LITTLE LIKELIHOOD THAT GUYANA WILL HAVE ANY INCENTIVE TO RESOLVE THE REMAINING BORDER ISSUES, INCLUDING THE ULTRA-SENSITIVE (FROM SURINAME'S POINT OF VIEW) TIGRI/NEW RIVER TRIANGLE DISPUTE. END COMMENT.

FAUCHER

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